

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Louisiana. It has been a pleasure to work with him, and of course the leadership of the committee.

As the Senator has pointed out, it does not add any money to the underlying bill, but it makes clear that there are four additional projects that are very crucial to the comprehensive repairs that are going on in the greater metropolitan area that simply need to be included. That is really the essence of this amendment.

It does not add any money to the bill. It does not authorize anything outside the scope. It has been ruled germane.

I again want to not only thank him for his good work but also acknowledge the leadership of the administration which has in the past few weeks come forward in terms of stepping up their leadership on this levee repair and how crucial it is to our area.

I commend the administration for their support of the underlying bill which is very substantial.

I yield the floor.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, in closing, I would also say that this amendment has been cleared by the majority and minority managers of the bill.

With that, I ask for a rollcall vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARTINEZ). The yeas and nays are requested.

Is there a sufficient second?

There appears not to be a sufficient second.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I rise to simply advise the Senator that I am told by staff that the authorizing committee has some concerns with the amendment and would oppose proceeding to a vote on the amendment at this time without the opportunity of discussing it with other Senators.

That is the reason I didn't raise my hand to authorize the yeas and nays. I have no objection to the yeas and nays being ordered, but I didn't want us to proceed to a vote without the benefit of the advice and counsel of the legislative committee that sent word they have some concerns about the amendment. I don't know what the concerns are.

As I reminded the Senate a moment ago, there is a meeting with the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State. Some Senators are at that meeting and I don't want to unnecessarily infringe on their interests by having a recorded vote as they are meeting on subjects of this legislation. This is a bill that funds the Department of Defense and the Department of State with supplemental appropriations to help pay for ongoing activities in the Middle East. This is a very important subject for Senators to understand at this particular time.

I am sympathetic to their situation and think they should be able to question the Secretaries about the use of funds in this bill and the general situation in the area where we are fighting the war on terror and trying to protect the security interests of our country.

Having said all of that, I don't want to slow down the Senate's consideration of legislation, but I hope we would not proceed to a vote on either the McCain amendment at this time or the Vitter amendment. We can wait until a little later. We will be on the bill for the balance of the afternoon. We hope to complete action on the bill at least by tomorrow morning. We appreciate the cooperation of all Senators and particularly those who are helping identify things that need to be addressed in this bill because of the devastating disasters that occurred in the southeast and the gulf coast region. They need the money now. We are not trying to slow down the action on the bill. We will not do that.

I thank the Senators from Louisiana for understanding and hope they will not push for a vote right now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. VITTER. If I could respond to the suggestions of the distinguished chairman through the Chair, I have no objection to scheduling this vote later in the day. I have been in a lot of contact with the authorizing committee, its leadership and its staff. I will continue to be in contact with them about issues contained in this amendment. I have no objection to proceeding to a vote later in the day.

I do wish to restate my call for a rollcall vote. I would be perfectly amenable to any unanimous consent order to schedule the vote later in the day as long as that vote is assured.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The yeas and nays have been requested.

Is there a sufficient second?

There appears not to be a sufficient second.

The senior Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. I suggest to my colleague—and the chairman has been so helpful on all of the amendments—would it be possible through the Chair to request a specific time, or would the recommendation be to set this aside and come back to it at a later time? We have been working for quite some time on this. Would the Chair wish to set a time or should we think about setting it aside and coming back at a later date? We do not want to disrupt the proceedings taking place, as the Senator outlined.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I understand the chairman and the ranking member have already accepted my amendment. I will speak to it very briefly.

The amendment they have accepted is straightforward, clear, and simple. It

affirms that the United States will not seek to establish permanent military bases in Iraq and has no intention of attempting to control Iraqi oil.

I know that is self-evident. We all know that. We know that is not our intention. The fact is, it is urban legend in Iraq, and our enemies in Iraq are using it as a rationale for continued opposition to the United States of America.

The Senate Appropriations Committee, in its report on the bill we are considering, noted:

It's the current policy of the United States to establish no permanent military bases in Iraq.

I commend the committee for this important finding. It is an important message, as I said, to say not only to the Iraqis but the whole world. The administration policy has been less clear thus far, so hopefully it will be useful to the administration.

I am sure the American Ambassador to Iraq understands the importance of the issue. In March he told Iraqi television stations that the United States has "no goal in establishing permanent bases in Iraq." But, unfortunately, the Ambassador's statement has been clouded by mixed messages from senior administration officials in Washington.

To my knowledge, the President has never explicitly stated that we will not establish permanent bases in Iraq.

On February 17, 2005, Secretary Rumsfeld told the Committee on Armed Services:

We have no intention, at the present time, of putting permanent bases in Iraq.

"At the present time" caused a stir.

According to a recent survey, 88 percent of Sunni Arabs in Iraq approve of attacks on American forces in part because they are convinced that the Secretary's statement means that we do have eventually a desire to have a permanent base in Iraq.

On February 15, 2006, at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, my friend, the Senator from Massachusetts, asked Secretary Rice:

Is it, in fact, the policy of the administration not to have permanent bases in Iraq?

Rather than answering the simple one word, "Yes," Secretary Rice said during a 400-word exchange on the question:

I don't want to in this forum try to prejudice everything that might happen way into the future.

Not a very reassuring message to our friends in Iraq. These mixed messages are confusing also to the American people.

But here is the most troubling thing. They make it more dangerous for our armed services, our men and women in Iraq on the ground. General George Casey, the ground force commander in Iraq, told the Committee on Armed Services last September:

Increased coalition presence feeds the notion of occupation.

According to an opinion poll conducted by a the Program on International Policy Attitudes from the